

Tyrrell's Pass.

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In 1597, during the O'Neill war, young Barnewell, son of Lord Trimbleston, marched south from Mullingar with 1000 men to crush the small Irish army of 400 under Captain Tyrrell, an active and able leader, chief of Fertullagh in Westmeath. Tyrrell intercepted him at Tyrrell's Pass in the south of Westmeath, then a long narrow firm passage, with bogs and brushwood on both sides. He placed half of his little army in ambush at the Mullingar end of the pass, under Owey Oge O'Conor chief of Offaly in Kildare: then retreating before Barnewell, he drew him on through the pass till he had caught him between the two detachments. At the proper moment O'Conor sounded the signal ("The Tyrrells' March" on the bagpipes), when Tyrrell suddenly turned round, and Barnewell was attacked front and rear. His army was annihilated, and he himself was taken prisoner.

Lough Ennell and the river Brosna are near Tyrrell's Pass.

I.

By the flow'ry banks of Brosna the burning sunset fell
In many a beam and golden gleam on hill and mead and
dell;
And from thy shores, bright Ennell, to the far-off mountain
crest,
Over plain and leafy wild wood there was peace and quiet
rest.
Brave Tyrrell sat that summer eve amid the woody hills,
With Captain Owey at his side, by Brosna's shining
rills—
Brave Tyrrell of the flying camps and Owey Oge the
strong,
And round them lay their followers the forest glade
along;
Four hundred men of proof they were, those warriors
free and bold;
In many a group they sat around the green skirts of the
wold.

II.

The sun had set upon their camp, the stars were burning
bright,
All save the Chief and Owey Oge were sleeping in their
light;
And they sat downward where the stream was singing its
deep song,

Planning fierce raid and foray bold that starry twilight
long.
“By my good faith,” said Tyrrell, “for days we’ve
wandered wide,
And on no foe, still, high or low, our good swords have
we tried;
There’s many a keep around us here, and many a traitor
town,
And we should have a town or keep ere another sun goes
down.”
Answered Owney :—“Or may fortune send young Barne-
well’s forces here:
A pleasant fight in the cool of night for me in the
starlight clear!”

III.

Sudden they ceased, and to their feet both warriors
instant sprang,
And down the little streamlet’s bed their challenge
fiercely rang:
They’d heard a sound beside the stream, as if some forest
bird,
Awak’ning from his nightly dreams amid the leaves, had
stirred.
A password: then a stealthy step like a wolf from out his
lair,
And their trusty spy of the falcon eye stood right before
them there.
“Young Barnewell, with a thousand men, high boasting
at their head,
Will find ye here in these green glades at morning light,”
he said ;
Then vanished silent as he came beneath the forest shade,
And the clank of sabres followed him on his pathway
through the glade.

IV.

For his comrades at their leader’s call beside the
streamlet’s bank
Were filing from their ferny beds in many a serried rank;
And now along their ordered lines Fertullagh’s accents
came:—
“The foeman through our native fields speeds down with
sword and flame:

We'll meet him as we ever did; and though we are but
few,
We'll meet him in the eastward pass, and give him
welcome due!"

They gained that pass when morning leapt above the
eastern wave,
And half his men to Owney Oge the hardy chieftain
gave:
"Now lie ye here in ambush close while we retreat
below,
And when the last of the band have passed we'll spring
upon the foe!"

V.

There came no sound from those ambushed men as they
crouched among the fern,
But the deep breath of the galloglass,* or whispering of
the kern;
The light breeze rustling through the boughs in the leafy
woods all round;
The chirp and song of the busy birds: was heard no other
sound.
And now along the misty plain shone out the morning ray
On Barnewell's bright and serried files all burning for the
fray;
A thousand valiant men they were from Meath's broad
fertile plain,
And when they saw Fertullagh's files they cried, in high
disdain—
"Two hundred men to stem our charge! We'll scatter
them like chaff!"
Then poured them through that perilous pass with mocking
cheer and laugh.

VI.

Now Tyrrell flies; but turns when he hears "The
Tyrrells' March" ring out:
He answers with the trumpet note and the galloglasses'
shout.
The startled wolf leaps from his lair: "Croak, croak,"
cry the ravens hoarse;

* Galloglass, a heavy-armed foot-soldier. Kern, a lightarmed foot-soldier. The galloglasses were large-limbed and fierce, and were noted for their fatal dexterity in the use of the battle-axe.

“We’ll soon have food for each hungry brood—the rider
and the horse.”
And out like wolves from the forest gloom on a close-
packed herd of deer,
Two hundred ran on the foeman’s van, two hundred on the
rear:
The kern go darting right and left, with their guns and
gleaming pikes,—
Woe worth the day for the struggling foe where’er their
weapon strikes:
The giant galloglass strides down with vengeance in his
eye,
Wild yelling out his charging shout like a thunder-clap on
high.

VII.

Now in the narrow open pass the battle rolls along;
Now ‘mid the bogs and woods each side the fighting
warriors throng;
As hounds around a hunted wolf some forest rock beneath,
Whence comes no sound save the mortal rush and the
gnash of many teeth,
Their charging shouts die gradual down—no sound rolls
outwards save
The volley of the fatal gun, and the crash of axe and
glaive.
O, life it is a precious gem, yet many there will throw
The gem away in that mortal fray for vengeance on their
foe.
In deadly silence still they fight, till the pass is covered
wide
With war-steeds strong, and soldiers slain, and many a
gory tide.

VIII.

Hurrah! that shout it rolleth out with cadence wild and
stern;
’Tis the triumph roar of the galloglass, and the fierce yell
of the kern.
The foeman flies before their steel—but not for far he
flies—
In the narrow pass, in the bogs and scrubs on eitherside,
he dies.

Where'er he speeds death follows him like a shadow in
his tracks—
He meets the gleam of the fearful pike and the murderous
battle-axe.
Young Barnewell was made prisoner fighting bravely in
the van,
And his comrades all fell slain around him—save one
single man:
That man they sped, and away he fled, unharmed by
galloglass,
That he might tell how his comrades fell that morn at
Tyrrell's Pass.